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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KCOR](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: IRAQI ISLAMIC PARTY WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS  
STRESS CONCERNS OVER CORRUPTION AND DETAINEES

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)  
AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Maysoon Ahmad Bekr, head of women's programs for the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), and Shatha Abd al-Razzak, IIP member of the Council of Representatives from Salah al-Din province and a member of the Iraq's Promise (Ahad al-Iraq) movement, told Poloff February 16 that the IIP women's program office is concerned about preserving existing protections for women's rights through implementing legislation under the new Iraqi constitution. This office and the human rights office of the IIP are also concerned about helping women whose male relatives have been detained by government and Coalition forces. They noted that such detentions are having a devastating effect on families, and the Ministry of Interior is not cooperating in locating those who are "missing." Bekr and Razzak also expressed concern about increasing corruption in Iraqi society, and reacted positively to Poloff's suggestion that the Council of Representatives would have the right under the constitution and principles of democracy to demand of the executive branch openness, transparency and accountability in government budgeting and contracting decisions. End summary.

¶2. (C) Maysoon Ahmad Bekr, head of women's programs for the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), and Shatha Abd al-Razzak, IIP member of the Council of Representatives (CoR) from Salah al-Din province and a member of the Iraq's Promise (Ahad al-Iraq) movement, told Poloff February 16 that the IIP women's program office is concerned about preserving existing protections for women's rights through implementing legislation under the new Iraqi constitution. Razzak and Bekr (who said she was likely to become a member of the CoR if other IIP members became cabinet officials) said that they did not speak for the IIP, but only for themselves. Razzak said that existing Iraqi personal status law was satisfactory in providing, for example, for civil courts to resolve family law disputes. They said they would propose minor changes to it, but nothing significant. They argued that if people wanted to avail themselves of religious courts to resolve such disputes, that should be up to the couple in question. They suggested that the judge performing a civil wedding could ask the couple whether the marriage would be governed by civil law, Sunni religious law, or Shia religious law.

¶3. (C) Razzak described how Iraqi child custody laws worked in practice. As a general proposition, a child over the age of 10 years can offer an opinion whether to live with the father or the mother -- sometimes, the child will express a preference to live with a grandparent. Custody of a child under the age of 10 is presumptively with the mother, if she wants custody. Iraqi law gives the mother the right to stay in the family home for three years after a divorce, even if the father must pay rent on the house in the meantime. This is considered an improvement over the minimal standards in Islamic law, Razzak said, which provides for only three

months' maintenance and hopes that the couple will reconcile during that period.

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CONCERN OVER MISSING DETAINEES  
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¶4. (C) Razzak and Bekr said that while the IIP runs a full range of women's programs, including courses on how to use computers, sewing and other skills; cultural programs and educational programs, a program getting increasing resources -- "90 percent of time in (party) headquarters" -- is helping women whose male relatives have been detained. They said that most complaints now concern detention by Iraqi forces, not the Coalition. Detention of the male breadwinner of a family often has devastating consequences on female relatives and children who may be dependent on the man for an income. Most complaints -- 80 percent, Bekr said -- concern the detention of a husband or a son. They try to make sure "no woman leaves IIP headquarters unhappy," but financial support is relatively rare. Most of the time information and an assurance that someone will look into the matter is what the women crave the most.

¶5. (C) Razzak and Bekr said that the IIP gets information from women on the time and place of the detention, and a description of the people making the arrest. They then try through political connections to find out what happened, but are unsuccessful more often than not. "The police are not giving out information about detainees," Bekr said. "People are starting to be desperate about not knowing the whereabouts of their men."

¶6. (C) The result of the failure of the police to give basic

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information on the whereabouts of those detained is causing neighborhoods to polarize, with Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad beginning to look to their own neighborhood militias to provide security that keeps out other security, i.e., the Iraqi police. "My hope is we never reach a situation like Beirut, when neighborhoods are separated," said Bekr.

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TRANSPARENCY IN BUDGETING  
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¶7. (C) Asked what they thought should be among the priorities for the CoR after government formation is settled, Razzak jumped on the issue of corruption. "The budget should be transparent," she said, noting that right now, virtually no one -- beyond a small handful of top officials -- knows how much the government really receives, from where, and how the money is actually spent. The average Iraqi does not know what is going on, but assumes those at the top are enriching themselves through corruption.

¶8. (C) Poloff responded by pointing out that in a democracy, the executive branch is subject to the power of the legislative branch to demand an accounting of government receipts and expenditures. In democracies that produce significant amounts of oil and gas, for example, information about reserves, production, revenues and contracting is considered public information. The issue of openness and transparency in government budgeting and expenditure is one in which reform-minded parliamentarians may find themselves working across ethnic and sectarian lines. CoR member-elect Razzak was interested in learning more about how she, as a parliamentarian, could become an effective advocate for greater openness and transparency in Iraqi government budgeting, contracting and expenditure.

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COMMENT  
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19. (C) Comment. Bekr, as the more senior of the two IIP women activists, manages overall IIP women's programs, and is interested in the concerns of the women who come to the IIP for help, no matter what the issue. Razzak is one of the more promising politicians of the "next generation" in the IIP. She expressed readiness to listen and to learn. No woman in a party like the IIP whose roots are in the Muslim Brotherhood will have much clout today, but if her willingness to speak out continues and can be supported, she may become a force to be reckoned with. We are hopeful that her interest in learning about how to more effectively advocate for budget transparency will be echoed by other parliamentarians. We will pursue efforts to assist Iraqi politicians and legislators in understanding the political economy of Iraq and the effect that public integrity can have in advancing democracy and Iraq's economic development. End comment.  
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